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AUTHOR Hertert, Linda
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ABSTRACT

In the early months of 1998 state governors delivered state of the state addresses that touched on concerns transcending state lines: taxes, infrastructure development and maintenance, crime, health, and public education. Some of these common concerns, with an emphasis on proposed K-12 public education policies, are discussed. The paper provides a brief overview of the governors' assessment of the current conditions in their states, looking at the most frequently mentioned issues nationwide and proposed gubernatorial policies for public education. Tax credits are a popular issue, and the paper examines how states will deal with income tax, property tax, senior citizens, farmers, and small businesses. The surplus dollars of many states will go to improving infrastructure, including investments in technology, roads, parks, and prisons. Crime and health are important issues that governors will need to address. The last part focuses on K-12 public education and issues surrounding basic school funding, school construction and repair, technology, early schooling, reading, social promotion, class size, school choice, teachers, and standards and accountability. (RJM)

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THE GOVERNORS PROPOSE: STATE POLICY AND PUBLIC EDUCATION, 1998

Linda Hertert, Ph.D.
Education Commission of the States
707 17th Street, Suite 2700
Denver, CO 80202-3427

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Research Association Annual Meeting
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THE GOVERNORS PROPOSE: STATE POLICY AND PUBLIC EDUCATION, 1998

In capitols across this nation, legislators gathered in the early months of 1998 to hear their governor's state-of-the-state address. These addresses typically focus on: (1) the success of past policy initiatives, (2) the state's current fiscal status and (3) the governor's proposed policies. Many of these policies are specific to the conditions and concerns of the individual state, such as the economic problems of Alaska's salmon fisheries, the status of video poker in South Carolina, the controversial federal program to reintroduce the grizzly bear in Idaho, the potential outbreak of toxic *Pfiesteria* in Maryland's waterways, the tension between hunters and landowners in South Dakota, and the status of native Hawaiians. Other issues are of common concern across states, including taxes, infrastructure development and maintenance, crime, environmental quality, health and public education.

This paper discusses these common concerns with an emphasis on proposed K-12 public education policies.[1] It provides a brief overview of the governors' assessment of the current conditions in their states, looks at the most frequently mentioned issues across states, and details proposed gubernatorial policies for public education.

THE STATE OF THE STATES

The name on the door of at least 11 governor's offices will change next year. With another 24 governors running for reelection, it is possible that a majority of states will start 1999 headed by a new executive officer.[2] It is not surprising, then, that this year's state-of-the-state addresses are reflective in tone, filled with descriptions of goals accomplished and challenges met.

High on the governors' lists of accomplishments in the vast majority of states is continuing economic growth and fiscal prosperity.[3] Vermont is "in the best financial condition it has ever been in," the economy in Oregon is "strong and diverse," in Oklahoma the economy is "bubbling with new growth and vitality." The optimism, pride and perhaps relief over the change from years of economic downturns, stagflation and budget deficits is best expressed by California's Pete Wilson, who said, "My friends, the 'comeback' is over. We are back."

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[1] Forty-four gubernatorial addresses, delivered between January and March 1998, form the primary data source for this report. Governors in Arkansas, Louisiana, Montana, North Carolina, Nevada and Texas will not report on the state of their states until the 1999 legislative sessions. Additional information came from Florida's and Montana's 1998 gubernatorial budget addresses.

[2] There are open-seat governor's races this year in California, Colorado, Florida, Georgia, Idaho, Illinois, Iowa, Minnesota, Nebraska, Nevada and Ohio. Incumbent governors are expected to seek re-election in Alabama, Alaska, Arizona, Arkansas, Connecticut, Hawaii, Kansas, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, New Hampshire, New Mexico, New York, Oklahoma, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, South Carolina, South Dakota, Tennessee, Texas, Vermont, Wisconsin and Wyoming.

[3] Hawaii and Wyoming are notable exceptions.

Being "back" in most states means low unemployment rates and increasing numbers of new jobs and businesses. Governors tout these economic indicators with a string of superlatives: unemployment rates are the lowest in state history in Alabama, Iowa, Kansas, Minnesota and Missouri, and at their lowest in more than 20 years in Illinois, Ohio, Kentucky, Michigan, Mississippi, North Dakota, South Carolina and Washington. Wisconsin manages an unemployment rate below the national average for the 11th year in a row, while Nebraska achieved the lowest rate in the country in 1997 with 1.9%.

New job growth is on the rise. Florida claims to be creating jobs faster than any other state in the nation, with Illinois claiming second place at more than half a million new jobs in the last five years. Georgia has been creating more than 2,000 new jobs per week since 1991. South Dakota leads the country in manufacturing jobs, rising 74% over the past 10 years. In 1997, West Virginia surpassed its all-time yearly high, as did South Carolina with a 75% increase in new jobs since 1995.

State coffers are benefiting from the economic upturn with many state reserves and rainy-day funds growing after years of stagnation. Governors in a number of states specifically report surpluses over and above state-required reserves and budget demands. The dollars are not insignificant: Tennessee estimates $127 million in surplus revenues, Maryland $283 million and Minnesota $1.3 billion. Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Vermont and Wisconsin governors also report surpluses. New York hit an all-time high, and Nebraska finished 1997 with the highest budget balance and largest cash reserve in the state's history.

In many states, these surpluses are as much a result of increased government efficiency and reduced spending as economic growth. For example, California repealed some 4,000 regulations and transferred authority for billions of dollars in transportation projects to local governments. Kansas reduced the size of government by more than 3,000 employees. West Virginia eliminated 500 positions in its Division of Highways in the past two years through retirement and attrition, while Rhode Island reduced its state workforce by nearly 1,000 people and eliminated three state departments.

While downsizing is important in limiting state spending, the biggest dollar-saving initiative is more likely the changes made in state welfare and public assistance programs. Virtually every governor reports decreases in welfare caseloads. These decreases are impressive. For example, Arkansas reports a 30% drop since July 1997, New Mexico a decline of 50% in 18 months, Maryland a 40% decrease in two years, and Wyoming a 66% reduction in three years. In Alaska, the number of citizens on welfare is the lowest in six years, in Indiana in 26 years and in Michigan in 27 years. The welfare rolls in Massachusetts have declined for 45 consecutive months, and in Ohio welfare changes have saved taxpayers $1.8 billion.

Regardless of the source of state surpluses, many governors propose to return some portion of these extra dollars to taxpayers. The next section of this paper discusses these tax initiatives and other proposed gubernatorial policies common across the states.

COMMON CONCERNS AND POLICY PRIORITIES

TAXES

Many governors choose to share their surpluses with taxpayers in the form of reductions, rebates and/or credits. Some governors with more recent memories of economic woes and budget deficits choose to use some or most of the excess dollars to build up critical state reserves. For example, Governor Howard Dean proposes to use most of Vermont's $33 million surplus to build up reserves in the Education Fund. For others — those governors more comfortable with the rising tide of economic prosperity — proposals often continue tax relief efforts begun several years earlier. The Minnesota Legislature, for example, is being asked to consider an additional $1.7 billion in tax relief over the next five years — the largest reduction in state history.

Income tax: Seven governors specifically mention individual income tax reductions, including a proposed $54 million cut for working families in Pennsylvania and a $100 million reduction for Maryland residents — the first such cut in 30 years. Other governors see income-tax adjustments as a way of boosting their economy. For example, Governor Benjamin Cayetano of Hawaii — a state yet to stand in the sunshine of economic prosperity — proposed the biggest tax cut in state history by asking for reductions in personal income tax and other levies. In Massachusetts, with one of the highest income-tax rates among the industrial states, Governor Argeo Paul Cellucci wants a 5% cut to make his state more competitive with Virginia, Michigan and Connecticut — states he said are "waiting to grab our businesses and our jobs." Governor Frank Keating wants to reduce Oklahoma's marginal income-tax rate from 7% to 3.5% over the next seven years. The state has the 16th highest rate in the nation, and as the governor noted, "explain that to a new college graduate when he finds out the income tax rate in Texas — it's zero. No wonder so many Oklahomans live in Dallas!"

Property tax: Property tax is also a target for change. Kansas Governor Bill Graves wants to continue reductions in his state's uniform school levy, moving to 23 mills for 1998-00. In South Dakota, Governor Bill Janklow maintains his goal of a 30% reduction in property tax during his tenure, while Governor Lincoln Almond in Rhode Island promises a new plan for providing tax relief for homeowners. Missouri Governor Mel Carnahan is advancing a partial credit on property tax paid by homeowners with incomes under $100,000 — for the average couple, this would equal a cut of almost 10%. Nebraska Governor Ben Nelson — finding that past attempts to ease the property tax burden by increasing state aid failed as commensurate local spending increased these taxes — proposes capping local spending at 2.5% a year and local assessments at 15% annually. New Jersey Governor Christine Todd Whitman wants to leave local increases up to the voters.

Senior citizens: Seniors will receive special consideration if the governors get their way. Iowa Governor Terry E. Branstad wants to stem the tide of long-time residents moving to Illinois or South Dakota upon retirement by doubling his state's pension tax exemption, with the intent of eventually eliminating the tax completely. Under the governor's plan in South Carolina, seniors will get a higher income-tax exemption, while in Missouri seniors and disabled citizens will see a reduction in their property taxes. In New York, Governor George Pataki wants to expand the

previously enacted school property tax, giving the average senior a 45% reduction and ensuring that in 10 counties he or she pays no school tax at all.

Farmers and small businesses: Two other groups benefiting from proposed gubernatorial tax reform are farmers and small businesses owners. For example, Branstad's plan excludes from capital gains tax the assets of Iowa's family farms sold or transferred to lineal descendants. In Tennessee, Governor Don Sundquist wants to exempt farm-equipment repair parts and labor from sales tax. Dean intends to give a 10% tax credit to small-business entrepreneurs who establish or expand their operations in Vermont. Washington Governor Gary Locke is recommending additional tax cuts to help small businesses "grow and prosper." Governor Tom Ridge's proposal encourages businesses, large and small, to set up shop in Pennsylvania's most distressed locations by declaring them "tax-free zones" and waiving all state and local taxes in these areas for up to 12 years.

INFRASTRUCTURE

Many governors also intend on using surplus dollars to expand and improve their state's infrastructure, both to boost economic growth and to improve the quality of life. "Infrastructure" includes a variety of capital-intensive activities, but the four most frequently mentioned were technology, roads, parks and prisons.

Technology: The growing importance of technology is evident in the presentation of four of this year's state-of-the-state addresses — in Florida, South Carolina, Pennsylvania and Minnesota the speeches are delivered live over the Internet. While last year's emphasis was mainly on technology in the classroom, this year governors also comment on the use of technology to improve government effectiveness and efficiency. As Nebraska Governor Nelson states, the intent is to "provide government services better, faster and cheaper."

To accomplish these goals, Colorado Governor Roy Romer plans to develop a communications network that links state agencies, schools, libraries and private-sector organizations, providing access to voice, data and video. Similarly, when West Virginia's network is complete two years from now, state government, colleges and universities, public schools and health-care providers will be linked by one statewide system. The importance of technology also was underscored by the proposed creation of a cabinet-level officer of technology in Virginia.

Roads: The condition and location of roads, bridges and highways continues to be of importance to governors and is viewed as crucial to a state's economic prosperity and citizens' quality of life. As Washington's Locke commented: "Gridlock on our freeways will cause gridlock in our economy if we don't act now. Already our ports are losing their competitive advantage because once goods leave our docks, they get stuck in traffic. And that's not the worst of it. The worst of it is that all across our state, the number of unsafe highways, bridges and intersections is growing."

Locke estimates the state needs $2.5 billion worth of critical improvements in the next five years, and he asks for an initial $220 million in bonds for these repairs. For similar reasons, Alabama's Governor Fob James proposes a $700 million highway bond issue. In Colorado, where there are

500,000 more people on the road than just five years ago, Romer estimated the state's needs at $13 billion — $8 billion at the state level and $5 billion at the local level. Governors in Kentucky, Maine and Nebraska also are requesting legislative support for their road and highway programs.

Parks: With mounting state surpluses, many governors also propose to improve the quality of life — with perhaps an eye to boosting tourism — by upgrading and improving their park systems. For example, Pennsylvania's governor plans to invest $2.5 million for maintenance operations in state parks; Graves wants to spend $10 million over the next three years to improve Kansas' park system; Tennessee's Sundquist is asking for $12 million; Governor John Engler needs $50 million to upgrade Michigan's 96 state parks; and, Alabama's governor is asking for $100 million in bonds. In Minnesota, Governor Arne Carlson is seeking support to add 100 miles of new trails, regenerate thousands of acres of forest and put many more acres into wildlife habitat.

Protecting wildlife habitats is just part of a greater interest governors show in securing open spaces to maintain their state's beauty and enhance citizen's quality of life. Governor John Rowland is proposing to "increase Connecticut's stock of open space to 21%" over the next five years. That's more than a half-million acres, at a cost of $160 million. Rhode Island's Almond wants to continue the expansion of "bike paths, greenways and open spaces" at a cost of $15 million. In Florida, Governor Lawton Chiles needs $300 million in bonds to preserve "unique and threatened" lands and $10 million for continued beach restoration and management.

Prisons: Enhancing the quality of life includes securing the public's safety, and public safety often hinges on the availability of prison space. Governors continue to ask legislatures to authorize spending to increase prison capacity. Oregon Governor John Kitzhaber, for example, expects to spend more that $1 billion over the next 10 years to build 13,000 new jail and prison beds. Florida is anticipating a cost of $47.6 million to build new prison slots, and $68 million by 2000 to meet projected needs for juvenile offenders. Wyoming also needs additional capacity as it has spent over $10 million housing inmates in alternative secure placements. Engler believes it is "imperative" that Michigan build more prisons, as do governors in Maryland and New Hampshire. With the escalating costs of housing prisoners, many governors are considering privatization of these facilities. For example, in Tennessee, Sundquist is suggesting that as much as 70% of the state's prison system be turned over to private management.

CRIME

The need for more prison space may be related to the "get tough" policies governors argued for last year. Truth-in-sentencing laws and the elimination of early release and pre-parole programs in many states are cited as the reason for crowded prisons and the reduction in crime rates. For example, serious crime was down 7% in Minnesota in 1997, 18% in Alabama and to a 27-year low in Michigan. Violent crime dropped in Maryland, New York, Ohio, Oklahoma and Wisconsin as well. North Dakota claims the lowest crime rate in the nation last year. As testimony to the belief in the effectiveness of recent changes in penalty laws, Governor Tommy Thompson of Wisconsin asked the legislature for a truth-in-sentencing law this session. He was emphatic on this point, stating, "...if not passed I will call the legislature back in session in April until they 'get the job done.'"

Penalties and sentencing: Many governors are asking for even more "punch" to existing sentencing requirements and penalties. Engler in Michigan, for example, wants to take action to ensure even longer prison stays for violent criminals and to get rid of the law that gives prisoners the right to challenge denial of parole. In Virginia, Governor James Gilmore is asking for tougher penalties for drug dealers or users caught in possession of a weapon and wants to prohibit bail while capital convictions are on appeal. Mississippi Governor Kirk Fordice wants to eliminate excessive delays in the execution of violent murderers on death row, and Iowa's Branstad is asking to extend the death penalty to include multiple killings and the "cold-blooded" murder of rape and kidnap victims. Colorado Governor Romer believes hate crimes should be added to his state's list of aggravating circumstances in death-penalty cases.

The most frequently mentioned penalty statute involves "sexual predators." Following the recent U.S. Supreme Court ruling on the "civil containment" of known sex offenders, governors in South Carolina, New Jersey, Missouri and New York are asking their legislatures for the authority to keep convicted sexual predators incarcerated "indefinitely."

Juveniles: While violent crimes are generally down across the country, many states are experiencing increases in the number of crimes committed by juveniles. Governors are responding to these statistics by asking for tougher laws. For example, California's Wilson wants juveniles who commit murders, rapes or armed robbery tried as adults, juvenile felonies recorded and tracked in a centralized system; and public disclosure of all serious juvenile offenses. In Delaware, Governor Thomas Carper proposed a "zero-tolerance" policy for serious juvenile criminals with probation violators sent to a "no-frills, military-style boot camp."

HEALTH AND WELFARE

The governors' concerns over children are not limited to criminal activities. In fact, the health, well-being and education of children, particularly young children, is such a consistent and dominant theme in the addresses that 1998 might well be declared "The Year of the Child."

Indicators: Governors are reporting a number of positive indicators on the status of children. For example, teen pregnancies are down in many states. California and Vermont report a 20% decline, Michigan has six consecutive years of declining rates, and, birthrates among teens are at an all-time low in Tennessee. Immunizations rates are also improving. Arkansas and South Carolina reached the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's goal of immunizing 90% of their 2-year-olds. Colorado is at 86%, and Tennessee recorded an all-time high. Child-support collections are also up. Alabama broke all records, collecting $192 million in 1997, while Tennessee's collections rose by more than $13 million.

Health insurance: The most startling indicator of children's health and well-being is the number of children without financial access to medical care. Spurred by changes in Title 21 of the Social Security Act by Congress last summer, governors across the country are asking for matching state dollars to change these alarming statistics.

The potential effects of these proposals are staggering. For example, Carper's request for matching funds under the Diamond State Health Plan for Children will enable every uninsured

child in Delaware with a family income under 200% of the federal poverty level to obtain a high-quality, low-cost health care policy — increasing the percentage of insured children in the state to over 93%. Similar effects are projected by other governors. Under the MIChild program, virtually 100% of Michigan's children will be insured. If the governor's proposal passes in Nebraska, nearly 30,000 children living in low-income households will be provided with basic health coverage under the state's Kids Connection program.

South Dakota covers 100% of the state's children under age 18 whose household incomes are 100% of the federal poverty level and children zero to six at 133% of the poverty level. With matching state funds, Janklow intends to extend coverage to all children under 18 years old to the 133% level. In Vermont, Dean's proposal extends coverage to all children with incomes up to 300% of the poverty level, approximately $48,000 annual income for a family of four. With $51.8 million more for TennCare, Tennessee's Sundquist intends to provide coverage for "every single child in the state under the age of 18."

Child care: The concern for the well-being of children also is evident in the numerous gubernatorial proposals to improve the quality of child care and to increase access to this critical service for working parents. The proposals include Governor Chiles' request to require background checks for any child-care providers in Florida; Thompson's to authorize annual site visits of every certified child-care provider in Wisconsin, including provisional providers such as relatives; Caranahan's to offer scholarships to workers to cover 75% of the cost of the training required to work in a licensed child care facility in Missouri; and Romer's to create a voluntary credential in Colorado that recognizes professional achievement and expertise.

Romer also wants to increase his state's child-care tax credit to equal the full amount families now receive on their federal taxes. In Tennessee, Sundquist intends to raise the state child-care reimbursement from 55% to 65%. Florida's Chiles wants $80 million in state funds to expand subsidized child care for working-poor parents. In California, Wilson needs $1.8 billion to provide child care for working-poor parents, as well as to increase the number of quality child-care facilities for infants and toddlers, and to conduct hearing screening for newborns.

The focus on children continues in the next section where the governors' proposals for public education funding and programs are discussed.

K-12 PUBLIC EDUCATION

Education continues to be a top priority for the governors, although it did not receive as much attention in this year's speeches as it did in 1997. For example, last year two governors — in Ohio and North Carolina — devoted most of their state-of-the-state addresses to K-12 public education. This year's speeches covered a broader range of policy issues. The following discusses those aspects of K-12 education most frequently mentioned by the governors, starting with school funding.

FUNDING

While state-of-the-state addresses do not provide the level of funding detail found in governors' budgets, they are often useful, however, in identifying the overall strategy and rationale for specific recommendations.

Basic school funding: If legislatures approve, most state education systems will enjoy increased revenues in the next fiscal year. For example, in Colorado, the governor is calling for a 3% increase for all schools, the gubernatorial recommendation in Kentucky is 4%, and Florida's governor wants a 6% increase.

The dollar increases in many states are substantial. In Connecticut, for example, the governor allocated an additional $93 million in the coming fiscal year and an additional $500 million over the next five years. Alaska's governor is planning to provide $24 million more for schools — only the second increase this decade. In Tennessee, the governor proposes allocating an additional $83.4 million, and in Nebraska $110 million more is planned for the K-12 school system. Engler in Michigan is proposing a budget of more than $11.8 billion — an all-time high for public education there.

These allocations are not without strings. For example, in Connecticut, Rowland stated: "It's not the amount of money that's important — it's how we spend it. That's why these new spending proposals come with the requirement that 95% goes directly to students, while only 5% can be spent on administration."

Similarly, Massachusetts' Cellucci proposes a "90-10" rule for schools. He explains: "For every new dollar we deliver to a school, they will have to spend a full 90 cents, and not a penny less, in the classroom, where it belongs and where it will produce results."

School construction and repair: While the basic education formula will increase in most states, governors also are willing to dedicate some of their surpluses to new school construction and long-postponed maintenance and repair. As Maine Governor Angus King notes, "deferred maintenance is a classic case of 'pay me now' or 'pay me a lot more later.'"

Many governors are planning to pay now. For example, Alabama's James is asking for $1.4 billion in bonds to "replace any and all substandard classroom facilities, permanent or portable." In Arizona, Governor Jane Dee Hull is proposing a setaside of more than $125 million to resolve her

state's capital finance crisis. The Kentucky proposal is $62.5 million, while in Florida — with dramatic student enrollment growth — the governor is requesting $592 million for construction of new public school classrooms as well as additional space in community colleges and universities. Finally, Wilson is proposing that the legislature place a $2 billion bond issue for school construction and repair on the ballot in each of the next four election cycles in California. On a one-to-one matching basis, these bonds will raise $16 billion to accommodate the state's ever-increasing student enrollment.

Technology: Computers, cables and wires were the most popular education topic in the 1997 gubernatorial addresses. Huge sums of dollars were proposed to start or continue technology initiatives aimed at linking school children to the world. This rush to invest was not always as well-planned as some might wish. As West Virginia's governor noted: "Last year, our state government spent $118 million on technology without a master plan. One can only imagine the waste, duplication and incompatibility problems inherent in that approach. Now the Office of Technology has, for the first time, completed a government-wide inventory and assessment of all technology. We now know what we have and what we need."

What many governors need this year is money to complete their school technology initiatives. For example, Romer of Colorado is asking for $20 million for school technology, and Governor Cecil Underwood in West Virginia wants $10 million to put computers in grades 7-12, bringing the fiscal-year total to $26 million for technology. Hawaii's Cayetano is proposing a private-public partnership to raise $10 million to put 10,000 more computers in his state's classrooms.

Other governors are asking for new funds to bring government departments and agencies online. Most, however, paused a moment or two to reflect and boast a bit about their success in bringing the world of technology into their state's classrooms. For example, Carper of Delaware said, "Every public school classroom will be wired for access to the information highway by this fall. No other state can make this claim." Perhaps not, but Maine's King notes that his state is "the first state in the country to have 100% of our schools — elementary and high schools — wired to the Net." Apparently South Carolina is a close second. According to Governor David Beasley, "every school in this state now has access to the Internet." Not to be outdone, Tennessee's Sundquist notes that his is "the first state in the nation to connect all of our students to a digital network."

Research brought new technology into many schools and government agencies over the past few years. Now, new research on how a child's brain develops is also influencing state policy. The following discusses the governors' take on this new information and other proposed education initiatives introduced in their state-of-the state addresses.

POLICIES

Eight governors[4] specifically mention "brain research" and its implications for early childhood care and education,[5] and a number of governors are proposing initiatives based on this information. In West Virginia, the program is "Starting Points"; in Indiana, "Building Bright Beginnings"; and in Rhode Island, "Starting Right."

Early schooling: Common to all these initiatives is a focus on providing quality learning opportunities for very young children. Wilson in California, for example, wants to expand existing preschool services to all 4-year-olds living below the federal poverty level. Branstad in Iowa plans to give every child a chance to attend all-day, every-day kindergarten. In Missouri, Carnahan is suggesting a voluntary prekindergarten program called "Jump Start." New York will provide prekindergarten funding statewide this year, and by 2001 increase funding to roughly 10 times the current amount. Almond requested a $1 million setaside from Rhode Island's education aid to be used by school districts for full-day kindergarten and preschool programs. Tennessee's Sundquist wants $3.1 million for an early childhood pilot program for 3- and 4-year-olds from low-income families.

Reading: Neuroscience research also has implications for how children acquire important skills such as reading. These findings, combined with some disappointing test results, made reading programs a popular gubernatorial subject. In Massachusetts, test results show 60% of the state's 4th-graders cannot read at grade level. The Michigan MEAP test shows improved reading scores, but 51% of 4th-graders also are reading below grade level. Less than half of the 4th graders meet Washington's standard in reading.

In response, many governors drew a "line in the sand." For example, in Michigan, Engler said, "Children who start kindergarten this fall must be able to read by the time they reach 4th grade . . . no exceptions, no excuses." Keating in Oklahoma is insisting that children acquire grade-level reading skills by the time they complete 3rd grade, while in South Carolina, Beasley wants every child reading by end of 1st grade.

To reach these standards, governors propose a number of new initiatives. In Connecticut, the governor wants to hire 300 new reading teachers for 1st and 2nd grades. Illinois Governor Jim Edgar plans to expand that state's READS program, which uses senior citizens as mentors and tutors of young children. Locke is proposing the Washington Reading Corps, designed to give teachers and principals the resources needed to mobilize their communities. The goal is to recruit 25,000 volunteer tutors across the state and to have teachers train them to tutor 2nd-5th graders in reading. Pataki of New York also urges additional resources, noting: "We must ensure that if

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[4] California, Indiana, South Dakota, Missouri, Ohio, Rhode Island, Wisconsin and Wyoming.

[5] Neuroscience research suggests the content and quality of experiences in the first three years of life directly and dramatically influence subsequent intellectual and physical capacities and abilities.

our children need extra help learning to read, they get it early — before it's too late. To advance a child who cannot read hurts the child and dooms [him or her] to failure."

The governor wants, starting in the next school year, to test all 4th graders to gauge their reading skills, and then provide resources for school districts to offer special six-week, summer classes for children who need extra help.

Social promotion: Pataki's observation of the dangers of "advancing" children who cannot read is shared by many governors. In California, Governor Wilson said, "Social promotion is the worst form of false kindness . . . social promotion is not honest and not fair — not to kids, or parents, or employers or taxpayers. We must end social promotion."

Keating in Oklahoma also calls for the end of social promotion, especially in elementary school, as do Engler in Michigan and Thompson in Wisconsin. In Delaware, Carper states the issue forcefully: "We call for an end to social promotion in the most important subject of all: reading. Socially promoting students who can't read is a crime against children."

Class size: Governors also discuss a number of strategies believed to improve teaching and learning. Reducing class size continues to be one of the more popular of these strategies. Massachusetts' Cellucci wants to hire 4,000 more teachers to reduce class size, and Michigan's Engler is allocating $20 million to the same end. Utah Governor Mike Leavitt proposes a middle-school initiative to reduce class sizes in 7th and 8th grade. In Delaware, Carper wants to reduce class size in core academic subjects. He is also planning to "hire more teachers . . . to provide a teacher for every 15 students at the K-3 level and a teacher for every 16.3 students at grades 4-12 . . . , capping class size in core academic subjects at 22 students and middle and high school classes in core academic subjects at 28 students."

Choice: School choice also continues to be a popular initiative to improve public education. As Vermont's Dean noted, the notion is that ". . . competition will do what regulation has failed to do." Joining Dean, New York's Pataki urges his legislature to "give charter schools a chance" as do the governors in Oklahoma, Idaho, New Mexico, Tennessee, Utah and Virginia. Whitman of New Jersey makes her request, stating: "I do not believe that we can, in good conscience, continue to force parents to send their children to failing schools if a better choice is readily available. . . . I call for public school choice by September 1999."

With a similar perspective, Wilson in California said: "I call upon you to provide 'opportunity scholarships' to 15,000 children trapped in California's worst classrooms. . . . Hundreds of thousands of them are suffering from educational malnutrition, . . . trapped in under-performing schools that stifle ambition. . . . I refuse to accept the absurd argument that rescuing 15,000 children from failing schools will somehow bring down the entire public school system."

Carlson of Minnesota summarizes the view of school choice this way: "I will do everything that I can to make certain that choice, competition and quality continue to drive our commitment to education."

Teachers: The commitment to quality that Carlson mentions is evident in a number of proposals aimed at improving teaching in public schools. For example, many governors are interested in increasing the number of board-certified teachers, including governors in Idaho, Mississippi, Washington and Wisconsin. Financial incentives are also part of some governors' strategies. In Mississippi, Fordice wants to increase salaries of nationally certified teachers to the national average or by $6,000, whichever is higher. Wisconsin's Thompson wants to give nationally certified teachers a $3,000 bonus and pay for part of the cost of taking the test.

Other governors want to provide incentives to attract the "best and the brightest" into the teaching profession. In Idaho, for example, Governor Phil Batt proposes raising beginning teacher salaries from the current $18,000 to $23,000, and eventually to $27,000. He also will create a merit pay program for teachers and administrators to reward and encourage outstanding performance. Washington's Locke is suggesting a four-year scholarship program for 100 outstanding college students planning a career in teaching.

Standards and accountability: Along with these teacher incentives, many governors propose standards of performance and accountability for results. For example, Keating in Oklahoma insists that all middle- and high-school teachers have at least a minor in the subject they teach. He is willing to give a tax credit for the courses teachers take to meet this standard and/or earn a second bachelor's or advanced academic degree in core subject areas. Ridgeg of Pennsylvania wants teachers recertified every five years.

The focus on standards, however, is not limited to teachers. Sundquist of Tennessee, for example, is proposing to "test every high school student in reading, writing, math and science, and require they pass them all in order to graduate. If they don't pass, they will be taking remedial classes in those subjects until they do. And they won't earn a diploma until they have mastered the material and passed the test. If you can't read at the high school level, if you can't write simple, declarative sentences, if you can't do basic math without a calculator — you're not ready to graduate from high school, let alone get a decent job or go to college. And we're not doing our children any favors telling them otherwise."

Governors also are proposing initiatives to deal with schools and districts that fail to meet performance standards. Connecticut's Rowland suggests allowing local school boards to close down chronically failing schools and reopen them with new teachers and staff, a strategy frequently referred to as "reconstituting." Carper proposes to deny accreditation to failing schools in Delaware. In Wisconsin, however, Thompson is more forceful in his approach to failing districts, specifically the Milwaukee public school system. He said: "Tonight, we demand results from Milwaukee Public Schools. MPS must meet four standards of improvement by June 1, 2000. MPS must improve its graduation rate to 90%. It must raise its attendance rate to 91%. It must cut its dropout rate to 9%. And it must raise its 3rd-grade reading performance to 90% of the statewide average. If MPS fails to meet all four standards, it will be dissolved. . . . We should pledge tonight that we will not lose one more generation of children in Milwaukee to poor schools. . . . It's time for MPS to stand and deliver or step aside."

The passion for the care and well-being of children implicit in Thompson's words is evident in many gubernatorial addresses this year. The importance of children, their health and education, was perhaps best summarized by Governor Paul Patton of Kentucky who said, "Not only are they the object of our affection, the reason we work from daylight to dark, the joy that makes life worth living, they're our future, the people who'll build the Kentucky of tomorrow, the ones we will depend on when we're old. Let us measure every proposal by its effect on them. Let us conduct ourselves as if our child were watching our every move."

SUMMARY

According to most of the nation's governors, happy days are here again. State economies are booming, and many social indicators are moving in the preferred direction. Education is sharing in the bounty. But if the governors have their way, young children and their families will benefit the most with numerous new programs and an unprecedented set of benefits to ensure the health and promote the success of the next generation. Now it is up to the legislatures.